

University of Groningen

Calliope's Ascent

Peters, Richard

Published in:
Rethinking History

DOI:
[10.1080/13642529.2016.1153308](https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2016.1153308)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Peters, R. (2016). Calliope's Ascent: Defragmenting Philosophy of History by Rhetoric. *Rethinking History*, 20(2), 235-258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2016.1153308>

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Calliope's ascent: defragmenting philosophy of history by rhetoric

Rik Peters

Faculty of Arts, Department of History, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

In order to find a cure against the pandemic fragmentation in current theory of history this paper aims at uniting experience, narrative, and action from a rhetorical perspective. Developing a pragmatics of speech acts about actions and events from the most simple to the most complex, according to the rhetorical situation in which they occur, the paper presents the notions of retrospective and prospective historical narrative as expressions of historical experience. In the end, it appeals to historians and philosophers of history to take rhetoric more seriously in order to make historiography practically more relevant.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 31 December 2015; Accepted 9 February 2016

KEYWORDS Rhetoric; pragmatics; experience; narrative; practical historiography

E qui Calliopè alquanto surga

Seguitando il mio canto con quel suono.

Dante, *Purgatorio*, I, 9–11.¹

1. Eppure si muove

Theory of history is suffering from pandemic fragmentation. In the past decade, 'the field' has been talking of memory, trauma, historical experience, hermeneutics, presence, narrative, epistemic virtues and the practical past without being able to indicate how all these things hang together. Symptomatic of the ailment was the opening conference of the International Network for the Theory of History in Ghent in July 2013. In the call for papers, the organizers, signalling an enormous 'diversity in theory of history', explicitly asked 'where the unity in this field is to be found. Is it a field at all?'² After 4 days of discussion

CONTACT Rik Peters  r.g.peters@rug.nl

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in dozens of parallel sessions on topics varying from the covering law model to hermeneutics, from historical experience to narrativism, and from the use of digital media to historical ethics, no answer to the question of the unity of theory of history was found.³

In spite of this disappointing result, the organizers of the conference still saw a bright future for the theory of history. In the introduction of a special issue of the *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, based on the conference papers, they claim that this future should no longer be sought in the discipline of history, but outside it, because, in the words of Ricoeur, 'historians no longer have hegemony in the space of retrospection' (Bevernage et al. 2014, 147). For this reason, the authors claim, the future of the theory of history lies in the reflection on 'public engagements with the past' which may vary from 'the use of the past, in court rooms, video games, and personal identity'. In this vein, the organizers appeal to their colleagues to 'engage more with the public outside of academia' in order to make theory of history practically more relevant (Bevernage et al. 2014, 147).

This appeal sounds heartening, but it is far from clear how a focus on the practical aspect of history outside the discipline of history can cure the fragmentation inside the theory of history. Indeed, it is to be feared that indiscriminate reflection on 'uses of the past' will only worsen the disease; in the end every 'use of the past' will have its own theory. To some, this disintegration of theory is not a serious problem, and some may even welcome it under fashionable headings like 'multidisciplinarity' or 'metatheoretical reflection', but in my view further fragmentation will eventually complete the deplorable estrangement between theory of history and the historical discipline, which began some four decades ago.

Whereas the first post-war philosophers of history still discussed problems directly issuing from historical inquiry, narrativists, inspired by the linguistic turn of the 1960s, began to focus on its end-product, the historical narrative. Initially, this shift of focus was most innovative, but eventually it developed into a new creed. Its first commandment was to brush problems concerning historical inquiry away as 'trivial', in order to study the problems of historical writing. For two decades, theorists thus studied the historical narrative in great detail, without greatly bothering about the other aspects of the historical discipline. In its latter days, when narrativism had completely exhausted its field, some of its practitioners solemnly declared that the discipline of history had come to an end (see, e.g. Jenkins 1999), like unfaithful lovers who reproach their loved ones for having become old.

By that time, theory of history had already gone through the 'experiential turn' that further widened the rift between theorists and historians. Like the linguistic turn, it began with an innovative approach to memory, trauma, historical experience and presence, and ended with the old credo that historical inquiry can be dispensed with. In the beginning, theorists were frank enough

to admit that their explorations of experience of the past and presence had no implications for historical inquiry (Ankersmit 2005, xiii–xvi). But soon, some of them became so infatuated with the deep secrets of the presence of the past, that they began to distance themselves from ‘ordinary history’. The absolute low point in this estrangement between theorists and historians has recently been reached with the claim that ‘historians do not think’ (Runia 2014, xi).

For several reasons, this estrangement between theory of history and the historical discipline is completely counter-productive. In the first place, despite the ‘turns’ in theory of history, and the dismissals of the historical discipline by some theorists, ‘ordinary historians’ have continued to do their jobs. Many of them have been highly successful; in the past four decades, historians have not only developed many new approaches to history, but they have also found vast audiences for their publications that have been disseminated in all modern media (Iggers and Wang 2008, 364–402). Secondly, unlike the majority of theorists, historians have indeed become more practically engaged. Sub-disciplines like public history, applied history and learning histories flourish, and have firmly been institutionalised, both inside and outside history departments. Historians have increasingly become involved in matters of politics and policy and their publications are widely read as, for example, the site *History and Policy* attests (see <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/>). Thirdly, and most importantly, historians have become increasingly aware of the practical use of their discipline. The recent *History Manifesto* speaks for all of them when it calls upon historians to ‘speak truth to power’ by offering a general audience long-term analyses of the pasts that have given rise to our present global crises of climate, governance and inequality (Guldi and Armitage 2014).

The recent development in historiography calls for a strong philosophical basis but, since many theorists of history are even more allergic to the idea of the practical use of history than to the historical discipline itself, this has not yet been provided. The main aim of this paper is therefore to outline a philosophical basis for the practical use of history. Fully endorsing the recent initiatives to make the historical discipline more relevant for practice, I propose not yet another ‘turn’ in the theory of history, but a return to the question: In what sense is history a practical form of knowledge? From this perspective, I will focus on repairing the relationship between historical experience, narrative and action, because it is here that the fragmentation in the philosophy of history now hurts most. Practicing historians tend to recognise the strong relationships between experience, narrative and action, but theorists of history have so far not been able to provide a coherent account of these.⁴

In order to fill this gap, I first return to classic historicism because this tradition explicitly based its view of the practical value of history on all of its aspects, from experience and inquiry to narrative and action. Next, I will pursue the classic view to its ultimate consequence by arguing that if history is to be practically relevant, it must first be persuasive; or in other words: history must

be rhetorical in order to be practically relevant. Since even the most pragmatic classic historicists eschewed the identification of history with rhetoric, I will merge phenomenology and speech act theory into a pragmatics of historical language. On this basis, I will claim that speaking about our experience of events from the simplest to the most complex is intrinsically rhetorical in the sense that it effects the audience's perspectives on the relationship between past, present and future. By this linking of experience, language, and change of perspectives on reality, I will 'subsume history under the general concept of rhetoric' (to paraphrase the title of Croce's first paper on the philosophy of history) more radically than has been done before in the theory of history.⁵ More importantly, this pragmatist rapprochement between rhetoric and history will provide a basis for defragmenting theory of history in order to provide a philosophical basis for the practical use of history both inside and outside the historical discipline.

2. The philosophical foundations of practical history

The best place to begin the defragmentation of contemporary theory of history is classic philosophy of history. The abiding relevance of philosophers of history like Droysen, Weber, Meinecke, Croce, Gentile, Gramsci, Oakeshott, Collingwood, Ortega y Gasset and O'Gorman lies in the fact that they were all active as historians themselves. In contrast to many contemporary theorists of history, the classic philosophers of history were not outsiders but insiders to the historical craft. Unlike contemporary theorists, therefore, the classic thinkers did not limit themselves to either contemplations of immediate historical experience, sublime or not, or to dissections of finished products, varying from monuments to narratives. For them, history, from experience to inquiry, and from narrative to action, was not something for the ivory tower, but it was for life itself.

This principle of the immanence of history to life had profound implications for the way these classic thinkers conceived of the relationship between historical experience, historiography and action. Firstly, it obliterated sharp distinctions between professional historians' discipline and so-called 'laymen'. Being convinced that all human beings make their lives by reflecting on their past, classic philosophers of history saw all human beings as historians. From this perspective, professional historians are only specialists in a form of experience that is common to humanity. Since it was always this common experience, and not the historical discipline, that had the last word in historical matters, the classic thinkers never claimed any hegemony for historians in the field of retrospection.

Secondly, unlike the so-called scientific historians of the nineteenth century who strove for 'objective histories' of a remote past, the classic philosophers of history held that all true history is contemporary history. This did not mean

that historians should no longer study remote pasts but that they always study the past from the perspective of contemporary problems.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the classic thinkers, deeply convinced that human life is historical, saw the historian's activities themselves as constituting history. The philosophical implication of this idea is that historians never merely describe a past that lies outside themselves but, rather, a process of which they themselves are a part. Or, to say it in classical terms, *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum coincide in medias res*. Or as the Italian historicists said: history is 'atto in atto', act in act, that is, in thinking and writing about the past, historians make history. History is therefore 'pensiero e azione', 'thought and action' (Peters 2013).

This view of the unity between thought and action formed the backbone of a practical historicism to which classic philosophers of history subscribed, though they did not explicitly use that term for their philosophies.⁶ It took a convinced pragmatist like John Dewey who, harvesting the fruits of his predecessors, stated in 1938:

A further important principle is that the writing of history is itself an historical event. It is something which happens and which in its occurrence has existential consequences. (Dewey 1949, 237)

Giving Athenian ancient historiography, nineteenth-century national history, and Marxist historiography as examples, Dewey argued that 'historical inquiry and construction' are 'agencies in enacted history' that modify the course of history they are describing. Interestingly, this pragmatist view of history was shared by many historians at that time, both inside and outside the English-speaking world. In the U.S., pragmatism inspired historians from Frederick Jackson Turner, Carl Becker and Charles Beard to Thomas Haskell, David Hollinger and Joyce Appleby to make history practically relevant (Kloppenber 2004; Wilkins 1959), and Mexico's leading historian Edmundo O'Gorman demanded that a new 'historiology' should take into account that historiography has always been a 'tool' to serve practical interests (O'Gorman 1947, 131–132).

In spite of this acceptance of pragmatist principles among historians, few classic philosophers of history have been willing to draw the ultimate conclusion of identifying historical writing with rhetoric. Though they recognised that historians *do* something to reality when they deal with the past, they did not explicitly acknowledge that their dealings with the past require rhetoric in order to be persuasive. Among the German historicists, only Droysen dedicated an entire chapter to the rhetoric of historiography in his 1857 *Historik*; his successors did not follow in his footsteps (Droysen 1967, 273–317, 359–367). The English and Italian idealists explicitly rejected rhetoric in their aesthetics, even though they implicitly accepted it in their philosophies of history (Maggi 1989, 162–163; Peters 2013, 369). Pragmatists, for all their interest in the practical value of knowledge, never discussed rhetoric at length (Bacon 2012; Hildebrand 2003; Misak 2013).⁷ In his 1944 lecture on the philosophy of history, Ortega y

Gasset explicitly identified ‘razón histórica’ with ‘razón narrativa’, claiming that both were essential to practical life, but without identifying historiography with rhetoric (Ortega y Gasset 1983, 237). Likewise, O’Gorman elaborated his idea that the function of historical narrative is to change the representations of the past into a pragmatist view of historical knowledge – one that did not include rhetoric, however (O’Gorman 1947, 269, 2007, 57–60).

In hindsight, the classic thinkers’ neglect of the rhetorical aspect of historical language is not so surprising given that even modern narrativists, who never eschewed the notion of rhetoric, have never fully employed it in the study of the practical effects of historical writing. Hayden White, for all his interest in the rhetoric of historical writing, has not extensively dealt with its pragmatics (Megill and McCloskey 1987, 224; Williams 2002, 242). Arthur Danto, who was very sensitive to the rhetoric of art, does not discuss the rhetoric of history in his seminal *Analytical Philosophy of History*. Louis O. Mink, who coined the phrase ‘narrative form as a cognitive instrument’ did not show how this instrument is to be used in practice. Finally, the subtitle of Ankersmit’s (1983) *Narrative Logic* shows that he was primarily interested in the semantics of the historian’s language, not in its pragmatics. And, in his most recent book, Ankersmit, speaking for mainstream narrativism, most clearly states its credo as: ‘whoever tells a story does not act’ (Ankersmit 2012, 40).

Only a small minority of theorists have discussed the pragmatics of historical language. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, among them were some practicing historians as well. The best known theorist who dealt with the pragmatic effect of historical language is perhaps the philosopher W. B. Gallie, who discussed it under the concept of ‘followability’ without relating it to rhetoric, however (Gallie 1964, 39–43). J. H. Hexter, a paradigmatic ‘ordinary historian’, wrote a classic article on the rhetoric of history in which he maintains that all aspects of history, from inquiry to writing, contribute to the communication of historical knowledge so that ‘the advancement of historical knowledge depends to a considerable extent on the quality of the historian’s rhetoric, on the efficacy of his historiography, and is almost inseparable from it’ (Hexter 1971, 27). In his *Comment on écrit l’histoire*, historian Paul Veyne recognises the ‘praxeological significance of rhetoric’ and uses the rhetorical notion of ‘topics’ in order to show how historical knowledge can make progress by extending its arsenal of questions (Veyne 1978, 145–153). In a chapter on the rhetoric of history, in their seminal *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*, Allan Megill and Donald McCloskey opt for a full rhetorical approach to history, arguing that historical writings can best be read as ‘orations’ (Megill and McCloskey 1987, 221). However, concerning the pragmatics of historical writing, they only discuss how historians create audiences, without elaborating on this view (Megill and McCloskey 1987, 231–232). In *History, Rhetoric and Proof*, Carlo Ginzburg explicitly dealt with the practical effect of historical writing, but in his zeal to secure historical truth, he limited his analysis to the efficacy of

logical proof, thus leaving the two other traditional rhetorical ‘proofs’, pathos and ethos undiscussed (Ginzburg 1999, 45–48). Against this background, the most important theorist of the pragmatics of historical language is the historian and philosopher Nancy Struever, who in a long series of books and articles, has elaborated her view that a truly pragmatic historiography can offer insight in the temporal dimensions of action only hand-in-hand with rhetoric (Struever 1970, 199). Together, rhetoric and history form a ‘valuable civil inquiry’ which is not engaged in finding philosophical certainties, but ‘in finding and posing political or civic possibilities’ (Struever 2009, 117).

In this context, Hayden White’s latest book, *The Practical Past*, may be seen as a breakthrough. Referring to J. L. Austin, White claims that we must think of all discourses, of which historiography would be one, as speech acts. In saying something about the world, White points out, speech acts ‘seek to change the world, the way one might relate to it, or the way things relate to one another in the world’ (White 2014, 34). According to White, the theory of speech acts may therefore fruitfully be employed to analyse historiography as a ‘praxis’, which he defines as ‘an action intended to change or have an impact on the world by the way it says something about it’ (White 2014, 34).

From the perspective of practical historicism, this proposal is most welcome because it expresses its central principle that making history and writing about history coincide. However, from the perspective of historical practice, White’s proposal needs further elaboration on three points. Firstly, Austin distinguished between ‘constatives’ which can be true or false and ‘performatives’ which are neither true or false but ‘do’ something. When one says ‘it is one o’clock’ or it is ‘good weather today’ one is using constative language, which differs from performative language, which one uses when saying, for example, ‘I do’ when marrying another, or when one says ‘I name this ship the Queen Elisabeth’ (Austin 1962, 5). John Searle rightly criticised Austin’s classification of speech acts, but his analysis needs further elaboration, before it can be applied to historical narratives (Searle, 1970, 68–69). Secondly, it is not entirely clear how speech act theory applies to historiography since it has primarily been applied to short sentences, or ‘utterances’, but not to large-scale narratives (Beale 1987, 82–83, 2009, 87ff; Wallace 1970, 3–5, 72ff). The relationship between speech acts and narratives therefore needs further elaboration. Finally, even if we accept the performativity of historical narratives, it is not exactly clear what practical effects narratives can actually have. More specifically, it is not clear how narratives about the past can make a difference for the future. As Nancy Struever pointed out, this problem of future possibilities is of the highest interest to show how historical inquiry and narratives relate to action (Struever 2009, 117). But before proceeding to extend speech act theory to historical narratives, it is necessary to investigate how experience and language are related since this is the foundation of persuasion.

3. Experience and language in rhetoric

Classical rhetoric located the performative force of discourse in the completion of the rhetorical argument, the enthymeme, or the ‘incomplete syllogism’. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle famously argued that when an audience is being confronted with an enthymeme, it will fill in the missing premises on the basis of their memory. As Aristotle pointed out, a speaker does not have to say that Dorieus won a garland when he won an Olympic contest since everybody knows that the prize is a garland (Aristotle 1991, 1357a15). The enthymeme thus typically functions as an invitation for the audience’s collaboration in supplying the missing premises of an argument for itself. From this it follows that the most important task of a speaker is to estimate the foreknowledge of his audience in order to construct the most effective enthymemes for a given rhetorical situation.

In the past four decades, modern rhetoricians have considerably expanded this ancient completion theory. Starting from the view that rhetorical arguments are not merely logical, but broadly experiential, modern rhetoricians argue that audiences can complete utterances beyond the logical. For example, the use of rhetorical presence, or the foregrounding of certain elements to represent something absent – think of Marc Anthony words in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* ‘you all know this mantle’ showing Caesar’s blood stained toga to the audience – has strong emotional effects on his audience (Perelman 1982, 35). Likewise, the antithesis ‘Don’t ask what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country’, said by a particular speaker, at a particular moment and in a particular tone, elicits a strong emotional response in the audience. Figures of speech, modern rhetoricians claim, are both ‘proto-arguments’ and ‘signs of emotion in speakers and triggers of emotion in the audience’ (Fahnestock 1999, 19). By using figures of speech, speakers solicit the collaboration of audiences who thus ‘experience’ both the logical and the emotional force of discourse (Tindale 2004, 70–1). Speakers ‘do things with words’, in the sense that they change audiences’ experiences of reality.

Though modern rhetoricians have fruitfully explored the experiential effects of arguments, they have not yet provided a theory that explains them. In particular, they have not yet provided a theory that expounds the conditions for experiential completion. Such a theory is necessary if we want to understand how experience relates to language. In order to fill this gap, I will borrow from Husserl’s theory of experiential meaning, ‘Sinn’, and from Collingwood’s philosophy of mind.

Husserl’s theory of experiential meaning starts from the principle of intentionality, which says that conscious is always directed toward an object. At the same time, consciousness also transcends its object by educing other possible acts of consciousness. When I see a vase, for example, I am also conscious of its backside and bottom, even if I do not perceive these. An act of consciousness

thus both intends an actual object and also goes beyond that object by pointing to other, possible experiences:

Every experience has its own horizon; every experience has its core of actual and determine cognition, its own content of immediate determinations which give themselves; but beyond this core of determinate quiddity, of the truly given as 'itself-there, it has its own horizon'. (Husserl 1948, 27; translation by Ludwig Landgrebe p. 32).⁸

Distinguishing between the actual object as the core of experience and the experience that goes beyond it, Husserl distinguished between an internal horizon of consciousness, which comprises the experiences which belong to the object itself, and an external horizon which comprises all possible experiences that go beyond it. To return to the vase, its form, a certain roundness, an opening on the top, and so on, belong to the internal horizon of experience, its capability of containing roses or lilies to the external horizon of experience. On this basis Husserl defined experiential meaning as the combination of the internal and external horizons of an intended object: for an observer, the meaning of the vase is the combination of all actual and possible experiences.

It is important to note, firstly, that this is not a semantic view of meaning; since actions and events are not a form of language, they do not have a linguistic but an 'experiential meaning'. For example, we can experience an invitation as pleasant, a gesture as inviting, or the traffic as dangerous. Secondly, it must be emphasized that Husserl does not exclude any object from consciousness; objects may vary from actual to imagined objects. Therefore, my consciousness of an imaginary unicorn may be as concrete as my experience of a real traffic light. Finally, when experience is expressed in symbols it receives a social dimension: given our customs and traditions we experience some gestures as inviting and others as not, some traffic as dangerous and other traffic as not.

Although meaning is not primarily linguistic, language is one of the most important media, if not the most important medium, by which we convey meaning to others. According to Husserl, the meaning-giving act of consciousness can be expressed by words that function as signs or indications for the hearer's understanding:

All expressions in communicative speech function as indications. They serve the hearer as signs of the 'thoughts' of the speaker, i.e. of his meaning-giving [sinngebenden] mental experiences [psychische Erlebnisse]. (Husserl 1968, 277 par. 7; translation by Smith and McIntyre 1984, 179)

According to Husserl's interpreters Smith and McIntyre, this expression of meaning in words is to 'perform an action', because it relates a bodily behaviour to an underlying intentional process of consciousness (Smith and McIntyre 1984, 179). The speech act thus always has an intentional aspect; to speak is to give meaning to things in the sense of eliciting acts of consciousness in a hearer. Stated in Husserl's terms, this means that a speaker's utterance opens a range of internal and external horizons of experience in the hearer.

When you employ the word ‘vase’, for example, you open in my consciousness a horizon of actual and possible meanings such as ‘breakable’, ‘may contain flowers’, ‘a good gift item’, and so on. In this way, meanings open ‘horizons of expectations’.

Linguistic behaviour, Smith and McIntyre point out, depends on what speakers hope to bring about with their utterances. By asserting, speakers typically try to get hearers to believe or to know what they say; by questioning, they try to elicit an informative response from the hearers; and by commanding, they try to prompt specific actions from the hearer (Smith and McIntyre 1984, 179–180). All this ‘works’, so to speak, because hearers are able to relate the speech acts to their own experience that is therefore the *conditio sine qua non* for the performative force of speech acts. Intentional consciousness of experience is the alpha and omega of all effective communication.

4. Emotions and language in communication

Husserl’s theory of meaning is useful in understanding why speakers can do things with words in the sense of changing the experience of reality; however, it needs two further emendations to explain how audiences can complete the experiential import of words. Firstly, whereas both classical and modern rhetoricians stress the importance of emotions, or *pathos* in persuasion, Husserl does not explicitly address the role of emotions in linguistic behaviour. Secondly, though Husserl makes clear what it is that a speaker does to a hearer, it is not entirely clear what the hearer is doing in the communicative act. In order to clarify both points, I will borrow from Collingwood’s philosophy of mind which explicitly deals with emotions and the role of the hearer in communication.

Collingwood is usually not ranked among the phenomenologists, yet his conceptual idealism was firmly based on the principle of intentionality (D’Oro 2003; 40–41, 45–46, 149n13). In his philosophy of mind, this comes most clearly to the fore in the theory of ‘selective attention’ which says that we only become conscious of something by attending to it. It is therefore by selective attention that we become conscious of our emotions. Focussing on one part of them, and leaving other parts in ‘the penumbra’, we become conscious of our emotions by expressing them in ‘ideas’. Collingwood calls this selective activity ‘imagination’, which he distinguishes from ‘thought’, the main function of which is to relate ideas. Accordingly, the first function of language is not to make statements but to express emotions; following Vico, Collingwood claims that poetic use of language precedes symbolic language (Collingwood 1938, 225–226).

Collingwood’s theory leads to a parallel distinction in his analysis of the relation between speaker and hearer. Before we understand intellectually by thinking the same thought, we first understand aesthetically, that is, by imagining things. In this context, Collingwood discusses the case of a child who expresses his satisfaction at throwing his bonnet off by exclaiming ‘hattiaw’

(Collingwood 1938, 239). According to Collingwood, the expression ‘hat-tiaw’ is a form of speech because the speaker is his own first hearer and conscious of his own emotions and of himself as expressing them. The person to whom the expression is addressed, in Collingwood’s example the child’s mother, constructs in herself the idea which the words express. On this basis Collingwood locates the act of understanding in the hearer: ‘Understanding what someone says to you is thus attributing to him the idea which his words arouse in yourself; and this implies treating them as words of your own’ (Collingwood 1938, 250).

Since the hearer treats the words of the speaker as her own, that is, she treats the speaker’s words as expression of her own emotions to which she can attend selectively, the speaker can never control what the hearer’s experience will be. Yet, this does not exclude speakers choosing words with the aim of arousing emotions in their audiences. Collingwood does not deny the rhetorical use of language but he only refuses to identify art with rhetoric (Collingwood 1938, 275–280).

To sum up, Husserl and Collingwood agree on the principle of intentionality: when we are conscious, we are always conscious of *something in experience*, and it is this consciousness of something that we express in language. But whereas Husserl equates language with symbolic language which expresses thought, Collingwood also recognises poetic language which does not express thoughts in concepts and statements but emotions in ideas. Speakers therefore not only open horizons of conceptual meaning in their audiences, but by doing so, they can also arouse the emotions inherent in these meanings, because hearers are able to treat the words they hear as expressions of their own emotions. The words ‘Do not ask what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country’ thus invite hearers to complete the argument and its emotional charge for themselves. To do something with words is therefore to do something with emotions in the sense that speakers can effectively change hearers’ emotions. Speech acts speak both to hearts and minds or, as the ancients already knew: pathos and logos are one.

5. Communication about simple events

As a starting point for an analysis of the performativity of historiographical speech acts, I take Oakeshott’s analysis of descriptions of simple events, or in his terms, ‘going-ons’. According to Oakeshott, consciousness of actions and events in the present can be qualified by an awareness of future or past, or a combination of both. To give Oakeshott’s own example: when I see a man on the kerb as trying to cross the street, my experience is qualified by an awareness of a particular future, in this case, reaching the other side of the road. Likewise, by attending to specific elements of a going-on, awareness of a particular past may be evoked. For example, when I see a man with a wooden leg hobbling, I

may infer that he has lost his own leg (Oakeshott 1983, 8). As Oakeshott rightly stresses, this awareness is not 'evoked' by neglecting the present or past, but precisely by attending to them. For example, by noticing the way the first man stands on the kerb, we direct our attention to the present, and by noticing how the man with the wooden leg hobbles by, we direct our attention to the past. Moreover, present experiences are not necessarily qualified by either an awareness of the past or the future or a combination of both. Combining Oakeshott's examples, I may see the man with the wooden leg crossing the street, and either say 'He is crossing the street' or 'He lost his leg' or, even, 'The man who is crossing the street lost his leg'. None of these descriptions is necessary, and all depend on what I attend to.

On this point, I wish to extend Oakeshott's analysis by noticing that the effect of an evocation of awareness depends on what we attend to in experience. In this directing of attention lies the performative force of descriptions of events. This force comes clearly to the fore in conversations. For example, when you see the man with the wooden leg, you can evoke my awareness of the future by saying to me 'He is crossing the street' or of the past by saying 'He lost his own leg'. You may also admonish me to pass by carefully by exclaiming 'he has a wooden leg', or try to evoke my pity by saying 'the poor guy!' I write 'you may', because, as Collingwood pointed out, in all these cases the effect of your words depends on the way I treat them.

When we differ about the use of words, we disagree about the meaning of a going-on. For example, when I say that the man lost his way, you may counter with 'No he is just crossing the street', in order to convince me of your view. Or I may counter a remark of pity at his lost leg by saying 'Well, at least he can walk'. These examples show that in situations of disagreement the choice of words becomes more delicate and even strategic with a view toward convincing each other. At this level, speech acts become manifestly rhetorical in the sense that they become attempts to change someone's view of reality in Husserl's sense of opening a new horizon of actual and possible meanings. Such attempts can be strengthened by using figural language. For example, as when I say to you, pointing at the man with the wooden leg, 'Look at Captain Ahab over there', thus opening a new perspective on the situation. Likewise, when I want to stress the swiftness with which someone crosses the street, I may say, 'He's flying'. In the case of the man with the wooden leg, you may take that as too ironical, and combined with a comparison to Captain Ahab, it might even arouse a feeling of disgust in you. All this exemplifies the first rule of rhetoric that speakers must adjust their choice of words to their audiences. This adjustment is not a priori given because the reaction to speech-acts is contingent; an audience may react in one way or another, but none is predictable. However, since audiences tend to react in certain ways to certain words, both logically and emotionally, the use of figural language may help to steer their reactions.

6. Communication about complex events

The performative effect of descriptions of events becomes more varied and complex once we have to describe events that extend over a longer stretch of time, and which do not have a particular past or future in view, as in Oakeshott's examples, but instead a range of points in time. It is descriptions of this more complex kind that Arthur C. Danto analysed under the heading of project verbs. Danto chose this name because such descriptions typically describe temporal wholes in view of their results. To take his example: When we see Jones putting seeds into a hole, we may describe this as 'Jones is planting roses', or when we see someone going to their desk late at night, we may describe this action with 'He is writing a book' (Danto 2007, 159–169). Project verbs can cover a range of activities by relating them to past and future events. The verb 'planting roses' thus describes all activities involved in the planting: digging, fertilizing, sowing, purchasing shovels and seeds before putting the seeds into the hole, and throwing the earth back in the hole, collecting the gardening instruments, and bringing the wheelbarrow back to the barn after putting the seeds into the hole.

As Danto correctly notes, the use of project verbs does not presuppose any continuity in these activities; Jones may have a cup of tea to mark a break and we can still describe his activities as 'planting roses'; and if the writer interrupts the writing of the book for some months, we can still say that he is writing a book. Moreover, the description of the activities need not be identical with the actor's intentions. Jones may think of himself as planting roses, but we may describe him as 'taking a rest'. Finally, the use of project verbs is not restricted to the activities of individuals since we may describe several people planting roses as 'the gardening club is planting roses'.

According to Danto, project verbs form the kernel of 'narrative sentences' by which we describe temporal wholes. Narrative sentences therefore always refer to at least two events separated in time (Danto 2007, 164). So, if we describe someone who is putting seeds into a hole as 'planting roses', we refer both to the present and to the future, that is, in this case, to the result of roses coming forth. It is important to see that the choice of these two events in time is free, and that there is no *a priori* limit to the number of narrative sentences by which we describe them. To give Danto's own example, we may describe Jones' putting of seeds into a hole as 'planting roses' or as 'Jones is planting prize winning roses', according to the expected outcome we wish to evoke awareness of (Danto 2007, 164). Likewise, though Danto does not explicitly discuss this, we may, along the lines Oakeshott indicated, evoke awareness of past events by saying that 'Jones is planting consoling roses' thus referring to the death of a loved one.

When we proceed to analysing narrative sentences about the past we enter a realm of new performative possibilities. So far, we have analysed situations in which speakers and hearers more or less share the same time horizon as the situations about which they communicate. But things change as soon as

speakers start to describe actions and events in the past. Firstly, speakers and hearers no longer directly perceive the actions and events about which they communicate. Secondly, since the time horizon of the speakers and hearers differs from the time horizon of the actors, multiple time horizons are involved, as Koselleck pointed out (Koselleck 2003, 249). The first problem has led to an interminable literature about the problem of how historians can have experience of the past. The second problem led to an equally interminable literature about the function of narrative sentences in historical writing. Both problems can be solved on the basis of the theory of intentionality as expounded above.

Concerning the problem of the experience of the past, it follows from Husserl's principle of intentionality that 'evidence', from footprints to books, opens various horizons of experiential meaning. As Collingwood pointed out, the interpretation of evidence does not begin with an act of inferential reasoning, but with the aesthetic act of understanding. The starting point of a historical argument is not 'This person, or this printed book, or this set of foot prints, says so-and-so' but 'I, knowing the language, read this person, or this book, or these footprints, as saying so-and-so' (Collingwood 1999, 54). This 'so-and-so' does not lie on the level of thought but on the level of the imagination; the evidence forms a language which first speaks to the imagination of the historian, who is therefore in the position of the hearer, or in this case, the reader of a language. When we read Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech, we treat his words as our own, that is, as expressions of our own ideas. And since all language is expressive of emotion, his words may arouse emotions in us.

This emotional impact of reading evidence is a fact which historians know from practice; most often studying the sources is not a cold-blooded affair but a highly exciting experience. To speak for myself: when I studied the trial against Marie-Antoinette, I was swept off my feet when she responded to the accusation of incest with the dauphin with the words: 'Si je n'ai pas répondu, c'est que la nature se refuse à répondre à une pareille inculpation faite à une mère. J'en appelle à toutes celles qui peuvent se trouver ici!' [If I have not replied, it is because nature refuses to reply to such a charge made against a mother. I appeal to all those (mothers) who are here!] These words so much evoked my admiration for the former Queen of France that I completely revised my views of the woman, whom I, like so many others, had formerly despised as *l'Autrichienne* (Moniteur octobre 1793, 139; Peters 2009, 19–20).

It is important to note that in all these cases readers are both active and passive. They are active, because they make the evidence speak; without the activity of reading, it would remain silent. But when the evidence speaks to them, or better, through them, readers may undergo its performative force: they can be surprised to find footprints going in a certain direction, be thrilled by the pathos used by the *Comité du salut public* which condemned her, or moved by Marie Antoinette's reply. All such 'moving' experiences challenge historians to make sense of them. This sense-making amounts to producing narrative

sentences that evoke horizons of experience in an audience. Interestingly, different historians can open different horizons of experience in order to elicit different intellectual and emotional responses. So, one historian may write that 'Marie Antoinette's execution marked the end of the Monarchy in France', whereas another may write 'Marie Antoinette's execution opened the repression of women in the French Revolution.' In each case, the historian plays with, or, if you wish, manipulates, the horizon of expectations of his readers by relating the execution of Marie Antoinette to a different moment in time, each evoking different ideas and emotions in the readers.

Given the indefiniteness of the future, these 'retroactive realignments of the past', as Danto calls them, can be multiplied infinitely; we can name and place an event in an infinite number of futures; including not only the past's future, but also our own (Danto 2007, 168). Writes Danto: 'To be alive to the historical significance of events as they happen, one has to know to which later events these will be related, in narrative sentences, by historians of the future' (Danto 2007, 169). Likewise, to establish the meaning of past events, it is equally important to relate them to real and possible events prior to them. For example, a historian who wishes to portray Napoleon as the defender of the values of the French revolution who was finally defeated by the reactionary coalition at Waterloo will stress that the wars preceding the Russian campaign were not initiated by the French Emperor but by the coalition forces.

Following the lead of Dutch philosophers Blom and Nijhuis, we can generalise Danto's theory by saying that historians give meaning to an event by locating it in contexts of a selection of real and possible events both prior to, subsequent to and synchronic with the event they study. By interpreting an event as a 'declaration of war', historians situate it synchronically with, for example, the gathering of troops at the frontier and generals pointing at maps, and diachronically with, for example, the growing tension between nations prior to the event and the outbreak of a war subsequent to it. As Blom and Nijhuis point out, every interpretation involves the collaboration of the audience: 'step by step, the narrative mobilizes and exploits the everyday expectations and intuitions of the imaginary public with respect to what is and what is not probable' (Blom and Nijhuis 1989, 44). In historical inquiry and writing, interpretation and evocation go hand in hand – and both address an audience.

7. The rhetoric of historical narratives

The question now is whether this analysis exhausts the rhetorical possibilities of historical writing. This question amounts to asking whether we are entitled to identify historiography with narrative sentences, or collections of narrative sentences. According to Danto and many of his interpreters we are, since the essence of historical writing lies in narrative sentences about the past. But, according to Mink and Ankersmit, this is not enough because history not only

describes but also explains or interprets, and this is only possible when we order the narrative sentences into a comprehensive or configurational whole that enables us to see all the events together; in other words, historical explanation or understanding is only possible in a narrative (Ankersmit 2007, 386; Mink 1987, 139–140). My position is that narrative sentences do explain by giving meaning to actions and events, although their explanatory force is relative to the extent they are organised into a comprehensive perspective. As soon as situations become more complex, and *ipso facto* our experience of them become more inscrutable, narrative sentences no longer suffice to explain. When our partner comes home late at night once, he or she may explain the situation by saying ‘I am late’. But after several times, more is needed. ‘It’s not what you think’ will not convince us; only a complete story sometimes does. The more complex a situation grows, the more a story is needed to harmonize our hearts and minds.

What kind of experience gives rise to historical narratives? Obviously, experience of situations that are more complex than observing a man with a wooden leg or Jones planting roses – or even reading Marie Antoinette’s appeal to the mothers attending her trial. In order to answer this question, I will contrast two kinds of experience: historical experience which is oriented toward the past and kairotic experience which is oriented toward the future. These are not mutually exclusive but represent two extremes on a scale which covers a range of experiences that partake of both past and future.

To begin with historical experience. In most literature on this subject, language and experience are thought to be incommensurable. For this reason, the connection between historical experience and historical narratives has not been made explicit. The most important philosopher in this field, Frank Ankersmit, repeats in all his works that experience and language mutually exclude each other. However, in his *Sublime Historical Experience*, he says that historians are able to ‘translate’ their experience into narratives. Johan Huizinga thus translated his sublime historical experience of Jan van Eyck’s triptych ‘Lamb of God’ into *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Ankersmit 2005, 133–135). But the metaphor of translation is not very helpful because, as Ankersmit himself says, it presupposes some commensurability between experience and language. Probably for this reason, Ankersmit has shifted to the notion of the ‘expression of experience’ in his latest book. Giving the same example of Huizinga and the ‘Lamb of God’, he argues that the representational language in the opening chapter of *The Waning of the Middle Ages* expresses the ‘moods and feelings’ Huizinga had while observing the triptych. Moreover, Ankersmit claims that by using representational language, Huizinga pulls his readers into the ‘vertical axis of historical experience’. Finally, it was this experience that Huizinga later summarized in one sentence that ‘captures the impression the book makes on its (well-informed) readers’ (Ankersmit 2012, 203–205).

Ankersmit’s analysis of the ‘birth’ of the *Waning of the Middle Ages* can be coherently rendered in terms of a rhetorical reading of Husserl’s and

Collingwood's theory of the relationship between experience and language. Through its shapes, colours, forms, and figures the 'Lamb of God' opened internal and external horizons of meaning for Huizinga. Each of these meanings had an 'emotional charge' for him, which he tried to convey to his readers by expressing them in words that were organized from a single perspective and which he captured in the title of his book. As Ankersmit pointed out in his narrativist theory, the title of the book embodies Huizinga's representation of the late middle ages; it is his proposal to see this period from a certain perspective (Ankersmit 1983, 188–192). If we ask ourselves to whom did Huizinga propose his view of the Middle Ages, the answer cannot be but 'the audience'; like all historians, Huizinga not only intended his books to be read, but he also wanted to convince his readers.

Historical experience and historical writing are part of an ongoing rhetorical process. As the example of Huizinga shows, there was the rhetorical force of the 'Lamb of God', which Huizinga underwent as a viewer. Rhetoric traditionally identifies this 'undergoing' as 'pathos'. Next, several years later, Huizinga expressed this pathos in the language of the *Waning of the Middle Ages*. By a careful use of language, or 'logos' in rhetoric, Huizinga tried to evoke new horizons of experience in his readers, who thus undergo the effective force of his language: pathos again. From a rhetorical point of view, Huizinga's attempt is not effective because his readers have the same experiences he had, let alone the experiences that Jan van Eyck had. Instead, it is effective because they are able to take Huizinga's words, or more precisely, his narrative organization of words, as a narrative of their own. It is this narrative that pulls readers into an experience of a past which is completely foreign to the present.

Ankersmit's discussion of historical trauma can be analysed along the same lines. According to Ankersmit, Francesco Guicciardini wrote his *Storia d'Italia* in order to understand the traumatic event of the sack of Rome in 1527. In Ankersmit's view, it was the rift between his intentions and the terrible outcome of the event's consequences that awakened Guicciardini's historical awareness, which then eventually induced him to understand the unintended consequences of his own advice to the Pope. Given the fact that Guicciardini himself was involved in the event, his *Storia d'Italia* can be seen as an expression of the experience of a historical trauma. As Ankersmit notes, the narrative grew out of the traumatic experience it tried to account for (Ankersmit 2005, 356–358).

It is important to note that this account can never be made by merely retroactively aligning the past because, after the sack of Rome, mere redescriptions of past events would not have convinced Guicciardini's readers. As Ankersmit writes, the sack of Rome caused Guicciardini so much pain that it was too great for him to permit assimilation in his mind (Ankersmit 2005, 358). A dissociation between past and present thus came into being and, with this, the traumatic past became an object for investigation. It was thus the dissociation

between past and present that made Guicciardini realise that his entire conception of the situation before 1527 was false. In Mink's terms, the sack falsified his entire conceptual mode of interpretation and analysis, or, in Collingwood's terms, his absolute presuppositions (Collingwood 1940; Mink 1987). In order to tell the story of the sack of Rome, Guicciardini had to reorganise his entire conception of Italian history, which amounted to finding a new configuration to comprehend the events – or in rhetorical terms, to invent a new frame to describe the past. Unexpectedly, all had changed, therefore, an entirely new narrative was necessary.

Both Huizinga's and Guicciardini's histories are examples of what I wish to call 'retrospective historical writing' because they focus on making sense of experiences of the past that present themselves to the historian. Retrospective historical writing is an important genre in historiography, but it is not the only genre. At least as important is the genre at the other end of the scale, which I would like to call 'prospective historical writing', because it focuses on proactively realigning historical events towards the future. Prospective historical writing typically occurs in situations that we experience as 'historical', that is, in situations in which we make important decisions – indeed, historical ones, because, when making them, we feel that they will have an enormous impact on the future. The most typical examples of prospective historiography can be found in political orations from Pericles to Obama. In moments of *kairos*, that is in view of taking crucial decisions for the future, orators do not passively experience an overwhelming distance to the past, but actively create this distance themselves. 'Now is the time ...' is the motto of the prospective orator-historian. Again, in situations like these mere redescriptions of the past will not suffice because the narrative sentences are no longer experienced as 'fitting' to reality. Only by opening new horizons of past and future can historical narratives change audiences' perspectives on the present in which they act.

This view of the rhetoric of historical narratives has important implications for periodisation, the most basic form of creating perspectives on time. In most historical writing, periodisation is predominantly retrospective. As Danto writes:

It is a period solely from the perspective of the historian, who sees it from without; for those who lived in the period it would be just the way life was lived. And asked, afterwards, what it was like to have lived then, they may answer from the outside, from the historian's perspective. From the inside there is no answer to be given; it was simply the way things were. So when the members of a period can give an answer in terms satisfactory to the historian, the period will have exposed its outward surface and in a sense be over, as a period. (Danto 1981, 207)

Danto accounts here for the normal case in which historians create *post facto* perspectives on history. But in moments of *kairos*, historian-orators create new perspectives on time *in medias res*. No longer satisfied with the way things are, they raise and answer the question what a new reality must look like. By

proactively realigning past and present to the future, they close a period to open a new one. In this way, prospective historiography literally makes history by speaking about it, and in speaking about it, it incites its audience to leave the past behind and to enter a new era in history.

As in retrospective historical writing, metaphor plays an important role in this making of history, but it has a different function: by using metaphor, the speaker proposes a new perspective on reality; not primarily in order to come to terms with the past, but in order to come to terms with the future. For example, Elisabeth I, in sight of the approaching Armada, removed doubt in her leadership by saying: 'I have the heart and the stomach of a King' (MacArthur 1995, 40–41). Or take Saint-Just, who convincingly framed his accusation of Louis XVI with the metaphor that 'the King is the enemy of the people', referring to the future with famous words: 'cet homme doit régner ou mourir' (Walzer 1974, 120–127). Finally, Churchill famously introduced the metaphor of the 'iron curtain', which, in hindsight, became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Prospective history is not the monopoly of politicians; in decisive moments in history practicing historians are engaged to write prospectively. To give one example: Guido de Ruggiero's seminal *Storia del liberalismo europeo*, written in 1924, the year of the Matteotti crisis, opens with: 'In France, liberty is ancient; despotism is modern', and it ends with: 'Thus recent experience affords a proof of the vitality of the Liberal State, hard beset, yet issuing victorious from the battle' (De Ruggiero 1925). De Ruggiero's readers immediately sensed the emotional force of these words that frame the entire book, and, as long as Fascism lasted, the book encouraged them in their battle against dictatorship. Likewise, readers experiencing the global crises of these days, immediately understand how the first line of the *The History Manifesto* – 'A spectre is haunting our times: the spectre of the long term' – relates to current problems of climate change, governance and inequality. After reading the *Manifesto*, they will also understand its last line: 'Historians of the World unite!' since the *Manifesto* is a most eloquent, and consciously eloquent, appeal to historians to contribute to the solution of global crises. 'The mission for history as a guide to life never entirely lapsed', the *Manifesto* claims, and all classic philosophers of history would have applauded (Guldi and Armitage 2014, 10).

8. Calliope's ascent

In this paper, I have attempted to subsume history under the general concept of rhetoric. Starting from the principle of the immanence of history to life, and its corollary, that historians always describe a process in which they participate themselves, I have developed practical historicism to its ultimate consequence by showing that all forms of historical writing are forms of rhetoric.

On this foundation the defragmentation of the theory of history can begin. First, historical experience and historiography can no longer be severed. The

ultimate consequence of the classic historicist principle of immanence, according to which historians make part of the historical process they describe, is that all historical writing must also be seen as a part of the same process. To write history is therefore a form of making it, and making history is a form of experiencing it. The main task of the historian is to express this experience in words, from the level of narrative sentences describing simple actions and events to the level of retrospective and prospective histories that describe highly complex events. Second, the gap between historical writing and action can be bridged because historians do things with words; they do not merely describe and explain the past, but they always do this with a view to the future. From a rhetorical point of view, historians are 'time-tellers', they tell us what time it is, not in the ordinary sense of those words, but in the more specific sense of where we are now from the perspective of the past and the future. Most importantly, such a rhetorical view of history will make theory of history more relevant to a broader audience. When historians tell us the time, they do not merely follow their personal interest in the past 'for the sake of the past', but write about the past for the sake of the future and in the interest of the audiences they address.

To many historians and theorists, this identification of history and rhetoric blurs the distinction between history and propaganda. Following Oakeshott, some of them will say that rhetoric blurs the distinction between the historical past that we study for the past's sake, and the practical past that we use for practical reasons (Oakeshott 1933, 102–108). Others will object that rhetoric, in its pursuit of effect, does not do justice to historical truth (Ginzburg 1999, 21–25). To the first group of objectors, my answer is that the distinction between the historical and the practical past is not valid from the perspective of practical historicism. Once we acknowledge that historical writing itself is a form of action, that we acknowledge that historians do something when they write, that historians make a difference to the history in which they participate, then we must acknowledge that the historical past is also a practical past. From this perspective, I propose to give up the notion of the practical past altogether and to speak of practical history instead.

To the second group of objectors, my answer is that from the beginning rhetoric has been reverent to the notion of truth; under the concept of *logos* rhetoricians have explored all the techniques by which assertions could be warranted on the basis of evidence (Ginzburg 1999, 21–24, 38–50; Perelman 1982, 1–8; Struever 2009, 1–7). My plea for a rhetorical view of history is therefore not a plea for propaganda. It is, on the contrary, an attack on propaganda, because the weapon against propaganda is rhetoric itself. Only if historians and their audiences are aware of the rhetorical function of historiography will they be able to distinguish propaganda from history. In rhetoric, the ability to distinguish between propaganda and rhetoric is part of *phronesis*, or prudence, which is the practical wisdom obtained from long experience of deliberation

about particular actions and events (Struever 1970, 193–199). The paradigmatic figure of prudence is the judge who reaches a verdict only after careful considerations of the case at hand and of existing jurisprudence (Gadamer 1979, 292–297). Following this example, prudent historians will carefully judge the rhetoric of different histories before writing their own. So, indeed, let Calliope ascend; her cures for Clio will be many.

Notes

1. 'And let here Calliope somewhat ascend, my song accompanying with that sound.' Translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
2. <http://www.inth.ugent.be/conferences/conference-2/conference/> Accessed July 7, 2015.
3. Despite the success of the conference, the question of the unity of the field remained contested, see INTH Conference, day 4, Round Table Discussion, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etJDwSzDz64>. Accessed, July 7, 2015.
4. During the preparation of this paper I asked over 100 historians in Mexico, Italy, England and the Netherlands four questions: (1) Have you ever had an historical experience? (2) Have you used that experience in your work? and (3) Do you think that your writing has some practical value? The great majority answered all these questions affirmatively. Only question (4), Do you think that history is a form of rhetoric? led to strong disagreement.
5. So far, many theorists of history have discussed both the rhetorical and pragmatic aspects of history, but they have not identified rhetoric and history on a pragmatist basis. Recently, some theorists have most fruitfully employed the linguistic notion of pragmatics, without identifying history with rhetoric however (Pihlainen 2010, 2014; Tamm 2014).
6. 'Practical' or 'pragmatic historicism' is a term that I have coined for the philosophies of Croce, Gentile, de Ruggiero and Collingwood (Peters 2013).
7. Since these overviews of the pragmatist tradition do not mention the words 'rhetoric' or 'persuasion' it seems that pragmatists did not take rhetoric into account, even when they dealt with the problems of history.
8. 'Jede Erfahrung hat ihren Erfahrungshorizont; jede hat ihren Kern wirklicher und bestimmter Kenntnissnahme, hat ihren Gehalt an unmittelbar selbstgegebenen Bestimmtheiten, aber über diesen Kern bestimmten Soseins hinaus, des eigentlich als "selbst da" Gegebenen hinaus, hat sie ihren Horizont'.

Acknowledgements

I thank Rodrigo Diaz, two anonymous reviewers, and the Amsterdam and Groningen sections of the Dutch Network for the Philosophy of History for their comments on earlier versions of this article. I dedicate this article to Nancy Struever.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Rik Peters is Associate Professor at the University of Groningen where he lectures in Theory of History, Rhetoric, and Learning Histories and Organizations.

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